

Narrative Construction of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program on Social Media: A Framing Study of Supportive and Critical Content

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the narrative construction of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) on social media through the framing constructed by supporters and critics. The study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach and Robert Entman's framing analysis model, which includes defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and recommending treatment. Data were obtained from comments, tweets, and social media posts discussing the MBG, which were then analyzed based on emerging themes and sentiments. The results show that supporters framed the MBG as a form of government social concern in addressing nutrition issues, improving child welfare, and encouraging community economic empowerment. Conversely, critics framed the MBG as a program still facing issues of implementation, food quality, benefit distribution, and the effectiveness of state budget use. These differences in framing are evident through the use of language, symbols, and emotions that shape the direction of public opinion. The research findings indicate that social media functions as an arena for shaping reality and public opinion through a framing process that generates both legitimacy and criticism of government policies. Thus, the construction of the MBG narrative on social media reflects a contestation of meaning that influences public perception of public policy in the digital communication era.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Free Nutritious Meals Program (Program Makan Bergizi Gratis—MBG) was introduced as a social policy designed to address nutritional, health, and educational quality challenges among children in Indonesia. The program is positioned not only as a form of state intervention in fulfilling students' nutritional needs but also as a symbol of the government's presence in safeguarding public welfare. MBG subsequently developed into a prominent public issue, particularly following its extensive dissemination across social media through videos of meal distribution, official visits, and visual campaigns emphasizing the government's commitment to the younger generation (Juditha & Darmawan, 2025).

Social media has ultimately become a major arena for shaping public perceptions of the MBG Program. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube demonstrate that public policies are no longer understood solely through official documents or mass-media reporting, but increasingly through visual constructions, digital narratives, and interactions among internet users (Syukri et al., 2025). MBG-related content has been intensively produced by presenting images of government proximity to citizens,

expressions of happiness among student beneficiaries, and symbols of the program's social success. This development indicates that social media has undergone a functional transformation from a mere communication channel into an arena for constructing public opinion and legitimizing government policies (Putri et al., 2026).

Empirical developments indicate that the circulation of MBG narratives has not generated entirely positive responses. Various criticisms have emerged concerning distribution mechanisms, food quality, vendor transparency, and the alleged politicization of the program. Critical content circulated on social media reflects public concern regarding potential inequalities in the implementation of MBG. Some posts even construct the program as being used predominantly as an instrument of political image-building rather than as a substantive solution to children's nutritional and educational problems. This situation has produced a contestation of narratives that demonstrates how different groups interpret the same public policy in contrasting ways (Syafaatu Azzahra et al., 2025).

The realities of digital communication demonstrate that framing plays a significant role in shaping public understanding of an issue. According to Robert Entman (1993), framing refers to the process of selecting and emphasizing particular aspects of reality in order to construct a problem definition, identify causal factors, formulate moral evaluations, and propose remedies for an event or issue. In the context of MBG, framing can be identified through the selection of visuals, captions, symbols, and diction employed in social media content. Government narratives tend to present MBG as an expression of social concern, whereas critical groups are more likely to emphasize distribution problems, political interests, and the financial benefits obtained by vendors (Fikri & Rahma, 2025).

The construction of narratives on social media demonstrates that digital information is never entirely neutral. Circulating content may embody particular interests intended to influence how society understands social realities. The social construction perspective proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann explains that reality is formed through continuous processes of communication and social interaction. Within this context, social media serves as an important instrument for shaping public perceptions of either the success or failure of the MBG Program.

Ideally, public policy should be oriented toward transparency, distribution effectiveness, and the comprehensive interests of society. Normatively, the MBG Program was designed to improve students' nutritional quality and reduce food vulnerability among school-age children. However, developments in practice reveal a discrepancy between the program's ideals and the public perceptions emerging on social media. Criticisms regarding food quality, delays in distribution, and the dominance of particular vendors demonstrate that policy implementation is not uniformly accepted by the public (Maifizar & Mulyani, n.d.).

The development of digital political communication also demonstrates that social media is frequently used as an instrument for legitimizing political authority. MBG-related content featuring government officials, nationalist symbols, and narratives of government alignment with the people indicates the presence of a structured political communication strategy. From the perspective of political communication, public policy does not merely function as an administrative solution but also serves as a medium for constructing political images and generating public support. Digital narratives surrounding MBG, therefore, cannot be separated from the dynamics of power communication within the digital public sphere (Febrian et al., 2025).

The contestation between supportive and critical narratives concerning MBG illustrates how social media functions as a discursive arena. Supportive groups tend to frame MBG as a progressive government initiative aimed at securing the future of the younger generation. In contrast, critical groups construct frames highlighting program inefficiency, the potential for corruption involving vendors, and the exploitation of welfare issues for political purposes. These competing frames have contributed to the intensification of public opinion polarization in digital spaces (Aryantini et al., 2024; Haryati, 2025).

Research on the framing of MBG on social media is important because the issue concerns not only policy communication but also the construction of social reality through digital media. A framing analysis of supportive and critical MBG content can reveal how social media produces meaning, influences public perceptions, and constructs legitimacy for government policies. This research is also relevant to the development of digital communication in Indonesia, which is increasingly shaped by algorithms, virality, and the contestation of public opinion (Syamsu, 2025).

The urgency of this research lies in the need to understand how narratives surrounding the MBG Program are constructed and contested on social media as a modern public communication arena. This study is expected to provide an overview of the framing patterns employed to construct images, criticisms, and public opinions concerning MBG, while also demonstrating the role of social media in producing the perceived reality of public policy in the digital era. The findings are expected to contribute

academically to the fields of media communication, framing analysis, and digital political communication, as well as to provide a basis for reflecting on the dynamics of government policy communication within Indonesia's digital public sphere.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to analyse the narrative construction of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (Program Makan Bergizi Gratis—MBG) on social media. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on the meanings, interpretations, and constructions of reality produced through digital content. The analytical method applied was Robert Entman's (1993) framing analysis model, which comprises four elements: problem definition, causal diagnosis, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. This framing model was used to examine how social media content constructs particular perspectives on the MBG Program through both supportive and critical narratives.

The research objects consisted of social media content discussing the MBG Program on digital platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. The study focused on content containing elements of support for or criticism of the program, whether presented in the form of videos, captions, comments, hashtags, or visual narratives circulating on social media. Primary data were obtained from social media posts directly related to the research focus, while secondary data were collected from scholarly journal articles, online news reports, government documents, and relevant communication literature to support the analysis.

Data were collected through documentation, media observation, and a literature review of MBG-related content on social media. The researchers collected and classified the content into supportive and critical categories to facilitate the framing analysis process. The analytical stages involved identifying the forms of narrative construction, linguistic choices, visual symbols, and communication messages appearing in each item of content. The findings were subsequently used to examine how social media constructs public realities and opinions concerning the MBG Program through frames circulating within the digital communication sphere.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Framing Construction of the MBG Program in Supporting Content on Social Media

No.	Account	Post/Comment Excerpt	Theme	Sentiment
1	Hackers plan plin	"MBG is only for people who know how to be grateful :)"	Recipients' gratitude toward the program	Positive
2	Rismi yati	"MBG is suitable for schools like this, not elite schools where people tend to create drama and are ungrateful."	Appropriate targeting: non-elite versus elite schools	Positive, particularly when directed toward specific target groups
3	Altaviaroz	"MBG is not only intended to improve children's welfare but also to create employment, support farmers and livestock breeders, and purchase their agricultural products."	Economic multiplier effects for farmers and livestock breeders	Positive
4	Caca 	"I am not a paid political promoter, but when viewed objectively, this is a future-oriented program and preparation for emergency situations: 1. MBG establishes public kitchens across Indonesia..."	National food security and preparedness for disasters or armed conflict	Positive
5	Unnamed account/heart icon only	"However, many young children are grateful to receive MBG."	Children's happiness and gratitude	Positive
6	Syafiyah	"For us in the village, MBG is a program sent from heaven. Eating meat, chicken, and eggs	Fulfilment of rural communities' nutritional	Positive

No.	Account	Post/Comment Excerpt	Theme	Sentiment
		used to be only a dream. Now President Prabowo has made it a reality."	needs and realization of political promises	
7	Bg mor	"MBG is only for people who know how to be grateful 🙏"	Recipients' gratitude toward the program	Positive
8	Xx_fii06	"Do not discontinue MBG because it helps many poor families. May those who demand its abolition experience poverty themselves so that they can understand!"	Continuation of assistance for low-income communities	Positive toward the program, but negative toward its critics

Table 1. Classification of Positive Comment Data on MBG Content

Based on the table of comments from supporters of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program, a framing pattern is evident that positions the program as a form of government social concern for the community, particularly children and lower-income groups. The narrative that emerges is dominated by expressions of gratitude, support for the program's sustainability, and the view that MBG is capable of addressing the community's basic needs. The use of terms such as "grateful," "helped," and "reality" demonstrates a positive framing that builds the government's image as a party present in addressing social issues. Comments about children happily receiving MBG also demonstrate the emotional construction that the program is understood as a form of state concern for the welfare of students.

Another framing emerging in the supporters' comments is that MBG is a program that is well-targeted for lower-class communities and rural areas. Statements about non-elite schools and rural communities that previously had difficulty accessing nutritious food indicate a narrative that MBG is a solution to the limited food access of the poor. Furthermore, comments mentioning the involvement of farmers and livestock breeders indicate that MBG is understood not only as a food aid program but also as an instrument for community economic empowerment through crop distribution and job creation. Supporting comments also framed the MBG as a strategic program with long-term social benefits, including for national food security. The narrative about "public kitchens throughout Indonesia" suggests that the MBG is understood as a form of state social preparedness in the face of emergencies. Overall, the pattern of supporting comments constructed a narrative that the MBG is a program that helps the poor, improves children's welfare, strengthens the people's economy, and represents the government's concern for the community's basic needs. Thus, the supporting framing constructed the narrative of the MBG as a symbol of the government's social concern for the people.

Framing Construction of the MBG Program in Criticism Content on Social Media

No.	Account	Post/Comment Excerpt	Theme	Sentiment
1	Cilok kuah mang ebeww	"Honestly, since MBG was introduced, my sales have declined drastically. I am a small-scale vendor who sells food at schools. However, I still support and take pride in this program..."	Impact on small-scale school vendors, while continuing to support the program with acceptance and sincerity	Neutral to positive
2	Mamahzhavi	"Although MBG has already been implemented at my child's school, my child still asks for a packed meal from home. According to my child, the MBG meals sometimes smell unpleasant and are occasionally spoiled."	Food quality and hygiene, particularly concerns about spoiled meals	Negative
3	Ppy	"I heard this from someone who has been selling food at a school. They complained that since MBG was introduced, students rarely buy snacks, and their income has declined."	Declining revenue among school canteen vendors and food sellers operating near schools	Negative
4	Fanny	"The budget is IDR 335 trillion, or IDR 1 trillion per day. Just imagine how many factories could be built with that amount to create employment. Help the parents, not merely the children;	State budget allocation and economic criticism concerning job creation versus direct assistance	Negative

No.	Account	Post/Comment Excerpt	Theme	Sentiment
		give them a fishing rod rather than a fish."		
5	Jack o'wee	"Regardless of the type of program, when its implementation is ineffective and inefficient, the outcomes will never be fully achieved. The impact is similar to what happened with LPDP. Both can have equally serious consequences."	Effectiveness of program implementation and comparison with problems associated with other public programs, particularly LPDP	Neutral or critical
6	K 	"MBG would actually be a good program if the country were already stable and functioning well. Instead of prioritizing MBG, the government should first improve the education and healthcare systems..."	National development priorities, with education and healthcare considered more urgent	Negative
7	Guruidol_nusantara	"Vote on whether MBG should continue: Yes, 32%; No, 68%."	Public opinion poll concerning the continuation of the program	Negative, as the majority of respondents opposed its continuation
8	Harrynatawijaya	"The news will not make any difference. Even if one million students were poisoned, MBG would still continue. Reports like this are pointless because the program is supposedly considered beneficial."	Criticism of the government's response to food safety and poisoning concerns	Negative

Table 2. Classification of Negative Comment Data on MBG Content

Based on the table of critical comments regarding the Free Nutritious Meals Program (Program Makan Bergizi Gratis—MBG), the prevailing framing positions the program as a public policy that generates problems in its implementation and distribution. The most dominant criticisms concern food quality, implementation effectiveness, and the economic consequences for small-scale community actors. Comments describing the meals as “smelly” and “spoiled” construct a narrative in which the quality and hygiene of MBG meals are questioned by the public. In addition, comments referring to student food-poisoning incidents indicate public scepticism toward the government’s response to food-safety concerns. This framing creates the perception that the implementation of MBG has not yet been fully effective or sufficiently safe for its intended beneficiaries.

Another critical narrative highlights concerns regarding the program’s economic impact on small-scale vendors operating in and around schools. Several comments state that, since the implementation of MBG, students have purchased fewer snacks, resulting in a substantial decline in vendors’ income. This situation produces a frame in which the distribution of program benefits is perceived as economically unequal across different segments of society. Furthermore, criticism of the large MBG budget constructs a narrative that the program is inadequately targeted, as the funds are considered more appropriately allocated to employment creation, education, or healthcare. Such patterns of commentary suggest that MBG is understood not merely as a social welfare program but also as a policy that generates debate concerning national development priorities.

Critical comments also reveal the emergence of public scepticism regarding the sustainability and political orientation of the program. Statements concerning ineffective implementation, together with public polling results indicating majority opposition, suggest a decline in trust toward MBG within digital spaces. The dominant framing patterns emphasise questionable food quality, an allegedly unequal distribution of benefits, and criticism of the use of public funds. Overall, critical framing constructs MBG as a program that is problematic in its implementation, produces particular socioeconomic consequences, and generates public scepticism regarding the effectiveness of government policy on social media.

Differences in Narrative Construction between Supportive and Critical MBG Content

Differences in narrative construction between supportive and critical content concerning the Free Nutritious Meals Program are clearly reflected in the language and diction used on social media. Supportive content tends to employ emotional and persuasive expressions such as “grateful,” “helped,” “caring for the people,” and “a program for the future” to construct a positive image of the government as an actor that is present in meeting public needs. By contrast, critical content uses more sceptical and problem-oriented terms such as “spoiled,” “food poisoning,” “ineffective,” “large budget,” and “declining income,” thereby creating the perception that MBG remains burdened by numerous implementation problems. These differences in linguistic choices demonstrate that social media framing does not merely transmit information but also directs audiences toward particular interpretations of public policy.

Differences in framing are also apparent in the visual symbols and emotions constructed through the content narratives. Supportive content generally presents images of happy schoolchildren, nutritious meals, and expressions of gratitude from rural communities to reinforce the narrative of the government’s social concern. Such symbols evoke optimism, hope, and emotional proximity between the government and citizens. Conversely, critical content foregrounds issues such as spoiled food, student food poisoning, complaints from small-scale vendors, and distribution problems in order to generate scepticism and public distrust regarding the effectiveness of MBG. These contrasting symbols and emotional appeals demonstrate that social media functions as an arena in which competing representations of reality influence how the public understands a policy.

The direction of public opinion created by these two framing patterns also reflects different communication objectives. Supportive content seeks to establish social legitimacy by presenting MBG as a welfare program that benefits low-income communities, improves children’s nutrition, and strengthens national social resilience. Critical content, meanwhile, constructs the opinion that MBG remains problematic in terms of quality, distribution, and national budget priorities. This situation demonstrates that social media is no longer merely a space for disseminating information but has developed into an arena for shaping public opinion and contesting digital political narratives. Therefore, the competing constructions produced by supporters and critics of MBG illustrate how the realities of public policy are formed, contested, and interpreted differently through social media communication.

Social Media as an Arena for Shaping Public Opinion on the MBG Program

In the context of the Free Nutritious Meals Program, social media serves as a primary arena for constructing public realities and opinions regarding government policy. From the perspective of framing theory, social media does not merely disseminate information but also shapes how the public understands, evaluates, and interprets MBG by highlighting particular aspects of the issue. Supportive content tends to frame MBG as a symbol of the government’s social concern for public welfare, whereas critical content foregrounds problems relating to food quality, program distribution, and policy effectiveness. These contrasting frames demonstrate that the reality of MBG in digital spaces is socially constructed, as the meaning of the program is produced through narratives, symbols, and communicative interactions circulating on social media.

The social construction of the MBG issue is also evident in the ways algorithms and virality amplify particular narratives among digital audiences. Content containing emotional, controversial, or socially relevant elements tends to generate higher levels of engagement and is therefore more likely to shape collective perceptions in digital spaces. Narratives concerning the gratitude of rural communities, the happiness of schoolchildren, and criticism of spoiled meals or student food-poisoning incidents spread rapidly because they are reinforced through comments, reposts, and responses from other social media users. This condition indicates that public opinion in the digital era is no longer formed exclusively by mainstream media but also by the active participation of social media users who continuously reproduce and circulate particular narratives.

Social media has ultimately developed into a space for both legitimising and criticising government policy. From the perspective of digital political communication, MBG is understood not only as a social program but also as an object of contestation involving public opinion and political image-building within the digital public sphere. Supportive content seeks to establish the legitimacy of the government by portraying it as responsive to nutritional and welfare-related problems, whereas critical content generates scepticism regarding the program’s implementation, budgetary use, and political orientation. This dynamic demonstrates that social media possesses considerable power to influence public perceptions of government policy through framing processes, digital interaction, and the large-scale, continuous construction of collective opinion.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the framing of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (Program Makan Bergizi Gratis—MBG) on social media is constructed through two opposing narratives: a legitimacy narrative and a scepticism narrative. Supportive content predominantly frames MBG as an expression of the government's social concern for low-income communities and schoolchildren, whereas critical content portrays the program as a policy that continues to face problems relating to implementation, distribution, and budget management. These findings indicate that social media functions not only as a channel for disseminating information but also as an arena of meaning contestation in which members of the public construct and maintain different interpretations of the same policy. The digital reality of MBG is therefore formed through an ongoing negotiation of meaning between narratives that support the program and those that oppose it.

Based on Robert Entman's framing model, supportive content defines the primary problem as inadequate nutrition and the welfare conditions of schoolchildren. The dominant narratives emphasise the gratitude of rural communities, the happiness of student beneficiaries, and the perception that MBG enables economically disadvantaged groups to gain access to nutritious food. In terms of causal diagnosis, nutritional problems are attributed to economic constraints and limited access to healthy food. Moral evaluation is subsequently directed toward portraying the government as an actor that is present and attentive to citizens' needs, while treatment recommendations take the form of support for the continuation and expansion of the program. This framing consistently establishes the legitimacy of MBG as a relevant social solution for improving public welfare.

By contrast, critical framing constructs a different interpretation. The principal problem is no longer defined primarily in terms of nutrition but rather in relation to the effectiveness of program implementation and its socioeconomic consequences. Narratives concerning spoiled meals, student food-poisoning incidents, declining revenue among school vendors, and criticism of the substantial state budget frame MBG as a policy that has not yet been implemented optimally. Within the causal-diagnosis element, the source of the problem is attributed to weak supervision, ineffective distribution, and the alleged presence of political interests in the program's implementation. This framing subsequently produces a moral evaluation characterised by public scepticism toward the effectiveness of government policy, while simultaneously encouraging demands for an evaluation of program governance to ensure greater transparency and accountability.

The contrast between these framing patterns is clearly reflected in the language and symbols employed by each group. Supportive content uses emotionally charged expressions such as "grateful," "helped," "caring for the people," and "a program for the future" to establish emotional proximity between the government and society. Visual symbols featuring smiling schoolchildren, rural communities receiving benefits, and representations of nutritious meals reinforce narratives of welfare and social concern. Conversely, critical content employs terms such as "spoiled," "ineffective," "pointless," and "declined drastically," directing audiences toward negative perceptions of the program. Representations of student food poisoning, small-scale vendors losing income, and criticism of budget allocations further strengthen the narrative of scepticism. These differences in language and symbolism demonstrate that framing operates not only at the rational level but also through the construction of emotional meanings that influence how the public understands a policy.

The findings also demonstrate the relevance of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's theory of social construction. The reality of MBG on social media does not emerge objectively but is constructed through the continuous production of narratives, public comments, visual symbols, and the reproduction of digital opinions. Within this process, social media users act not merely as recipients of information but also as active participants who produce and disseminate meaning. Collective emotions, including optimism, hope, gratitude, disappointment, and distrust, become important instruments that intensify the circulation of narratives and shape public perceptions of the program. This finding indicates that digital communication operates through the combination of information, symbols, and emotions in constructing social reality.

The perspective of digital political communication further confirms that MBG is understood not only as a nutritional policy but also as an object of political legitimation and contestation within the digital public sphere. Supportive content seeks to construct the government's image as an actor responsive to public needs, whereas critical content presents narratives concerning political image-building, implementation problems, and budgetary management regarded as problematic. This condition demonstrates that social media has developed into a strategic arena for shaping public opinion and contesting policy narratives. The broader significance of this study is that public-policy reality in the digital era is not singular but is formed through dynamic processes of framing, symbolisation, and the

reproduction of opinion. Social media therefore possesses substantial power to construct, sustain, and simultaneously contest sociopolitical realities within digital society.

Table 3. Robert Entman's Framing Synthesis Table

Entman's Framing Element	Supportive Content/Comments	Critical Content/Comments
Define Problems	Malnutrition and unequal access to nutritious food among schoolchildren.	Ineffective program implementation, food hygiene problems, and adverse economic effects on small-scale vendors.
Diagnose Causes	Economic constraints experienced by low-income communities and populations in rural areas.	Weak food-quality supervision, ineffective distribution, and political interests related to government image-building.
Make Moral Judgement	The government is represented as a caring and responsible manifestation of the state's presence.	Scepticism regarding government accountability and the prioritisation of public budget allocations.
Treatment Recommendation	The MBG Program should be continued, supported, and expanded in scale.	A comprehensive evaluation of program implementation, improvements to fundamental public systems such as education and healthcare, or the reallocation of the budget toward employment creation.

Robert Entman's framing synthesis table shows that supporters and critics construct the reality of the Free Nutritional Meals Program (MBG) differently. Supporters define MBG as a solution to nutritional problems and limited access to food due to the community's economic conditions, thus positioning the government as a caring and responsible actor in improving the people's welfare. In contrast, critics view the main problems as program implementation, food quality, distribution, and alleged political interests influencing its implementation. These differences result in opposing recommendations: support for the program's continuation from supporters and demands for a comprehensive evaluation from critics. These findings confirm that MBG has become an arena for framing contestation on social media that shapes public perception and opinion regarding government policy.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the narrative construction of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) on social media is formed through two opposing frames: supporting and criticizing. Supporting content frames MBG as a symbol of the government's social concern for public welfare, child nutrition, and people's economic empowerment, while criticizing content constructs a narrative regarding implementation issues, food quality, program distribution, and skepticism regarding the policy's effectiveness and political orientation. The differences in framing are evident through the use of language, visual symbols, emotions, and the direction of public opinion constructed on social media. The research findings demonstrate that social media plays a significant role as an arena for the formation of public opinion and the construction of policy reality through framing processes, digital interactions, and massive narrative reproduction. Thus, the reality of MBG in the digital space is not singular, but rather constructed through a narrative battle between the government's social legitimacy and public criticism of policy implementation.

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